

Director of Central Intelligence

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The Prospects for Change in Sino-Soviet Relations

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National Intelligence Estimate

Key Judgments

*These Key Judgments represent the views
of the Director of Central Intelligence
with the advice and assistance of the
US Intelligence Community.*

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***The following intelligence organizations participated
in the preparation of these Key Judgments:***

The Central Intelligence Agency

The Defense Intelligence Agency

The National Security Agency

The Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State

The Office of Intelligence Support, Department of the Treasury

also participating:

The Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force

The National Foreign Intelligence Board concurs.

***The full text of this Estimate is being published
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Key Judgments

We believe there is a high probability of significant improvement in Sino-Soviet relations in the next six months or so that will ultimately lead to a Sino-Soviet summit within the two- to three-year time frame covered by this Estimate. While Sino-Soviet relations have been improving since the early 1980s, General Secretary Gorbachev's ascendancy and his subsequent reorientation of Soviet policies have added significant impetus to the process. In particular, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the warming of US-Soviet relations, and progress on the Cambodian issue have changed China's attitudes and increased its flexibility in dealing with the USSR:

- The Sino-Soviet relationship could even advance to the point where there is also a Sino-Soviet border agreement, resumption of party-to-party ties, a statement of principles on relations, and perhaps the beginning of talks to reduce forces along the border.

Relations, however, are not likely to progress to the point where China moves to a truly equidistant position in the Sino-Soviet-US triangular relationship or stops competing with the USSR in many regions of the world. Although we expect military contacts to develop, we do not believe they will extend to major arms sales, advanced technology transfer, or genuine military cooperation. Past disputes, lingering distrust, geopolitical rivalry, and conflicting national ambitions will continue to bound the reconciliation and promote disagreements.

The pace and extent of improvement will depend in large part on whether:

- Both sides maintain a reformist course at home and continue to see a more peaceful international environment as essential to the pursuit of domestic reforms.
- The Soviet-US and Sino-US dialogues remain essentially on track.
- There is continued progress toward resolution of the Cambodian conflict.
- The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan is interrupted.
- The Chinese maintain their positive assessment of Gorbachev and his staying power.

Improved Sino-Soviet relations will increase Chinese and Soviet leverage in relations with the United States and add to Gorbachev's image as a peacemaker. The already minimal potential for Sino-Soviet military conflict will recede even further. This will increase pressure on the United States to articulate its policies in a more challenging political environment.

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Moreover, the more rapid the pace of improvements in Sino-Soviet relations, the more pronounced will be their impact on US freedom of maneuver in East Asia. For example, in an atmosphere of triangular detente, Japan probably will be under greater pressure to improve its relations with the Soviet Union. Moreover, if the image of the Soviet military threat in East Asia is diminished, US allies may see less need to spend money on defense or permit US military access.

Nonetheless, the improvements in Sino-Soviet relations envisioned in this Estimate will not, in our view, fundamentally threaten US interests in the next two to three years:

- Expanding contacts will make it easier for the two sides to coordinate actions where their interests coincide, but they will remain competitors pursuing their own very different geopolitical agendas.
- We do not believe that any Chinese or Soviet forces withdrawn from the border region as a result of diminished military competition will be redeployed to measurably augment the threat to NATO or to US allies in the Pacific.
- Although Moscow will try to take advantage of increased Sino-Soviet economic interaction to try to get more Western technology, China will act to limit such gains lest it jeopardize its own access to such technology.
- If Sino-Soviet relations improve sufficiently to be perceived as threatening, Asian countries may seek greater US support.

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